

Love it or hate it?

# Reclaim



# your Period

Debunking period & PMS  
myths

For menstruators, non-menstruators, partners and  
anyone interested!

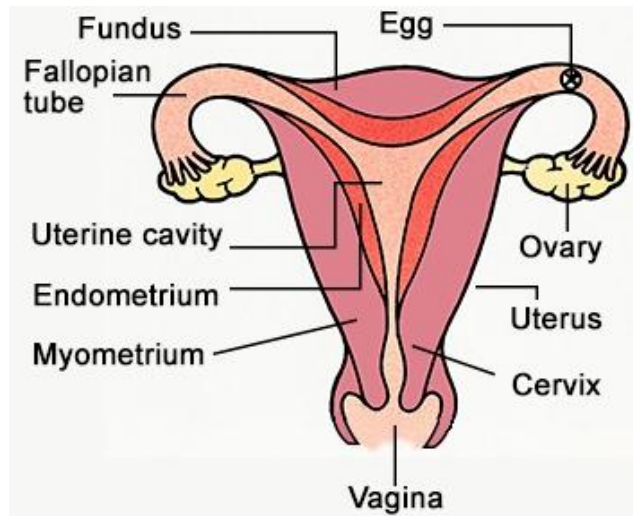
# What is Menstruation?

Every month, the uterus forms a lining on its wall made of mostly blood. This is in preparation for a potential foetus to start growing within the uterus. When no egg is fertilised, and no foetus begins to grow the uterus starts to shed the blood lining which exits the body via the vagina. This cleansing process lasts 3-5 days on average but can last longer. The first day of bleeding is the first day of the period and marks the beginning of the cycle (which lasts about one month).

At approximately day 14 of the cycle, an egg will be released from the ovaries and travel down the fallopian tubes to be fertilised by sperm. If no sperm fertilise the egg, they will simply pass through unnoticed with the period. If the egg is fertilised it will attach to the lining of the uterus and potentially grow into a baby. In this case, usually no period will be had for that month or the entire 9 months of pregnancy.

There is a variety of things that you can use to catch your period:

Most often used are pads and tampons however menstrual cups are a “waste-free” reusable option. The small rubbery cup sits in your vagina and catches the blood. They are then washed and reused.





# Who Menstruates?



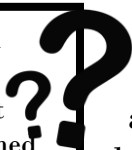
Menstruation can happen to anyone who is born with a uterus. Once they go through puberty (usually beginning from ages 11-16 but can happen as early as 9 years old), they will likely start going through this monthly cycle.



There are a few cases where menstruation may not occur or where it is irregular. For example, those with polycystic ovary syndrome may not menstruate or only menstruate irregularly. Alternatively, those who have had a hysterectomy will not menstruate.

**Transgender:** A person who identifies with a gender other than that which they were assigned at birth.

**Cisgender:** A cisgendered or cis person is someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.



It is important to remember that menstruation is not solely a “woman’s thing” and that not all women menstruate. Just because someone assigned female at birth does not mean that is the gender they identify with, same goes for those who are assigned male at birth. Some people who are born with a female reproductive system identify as non-binary and use “they, their” pronouns and

some identify as a transperson or as male and use “he, him” pronouns- these people will likely still get a period unless medical/hormonal/surgical intervention has inhibited this. By the same token someone who was born with male reproductive parts may identify as a

woman and therefore would be a woman who does not menstruate.

**Transgender** and non-binary people can experience gender dysphoria when their body and its functions do not match their gender identity as they do for **cisgendered** people. This can be a traumatic and anxiety causing time and is often misunderstood by others in society. It is important that we start to recognise that periods do not only belong to cisgendered women but to other genders as well.



# Why is menstruation taboo?

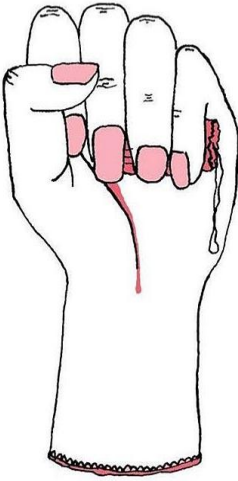


The stigma that has formed around the menstrual time is one of the oldest forms of **misogyny**. We have been conditioned to hide our periods from the very beginning, to make code names for it and to feel shame or embarrassment around it. We can't keep doing this!

Many major religions have negatively influenced period stigma, believing it to be impure and unclean. However, there are also some cultures which see menstruation in a positive light and respect those who menstruate.

This is a quote from the first Latin encyclopaedia (73 ACE):  
*“Contact with [menstrual blood] turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seed in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees fall off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.”*

FIGHT FOR  
#PERIOD POSITIVITY



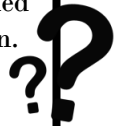
There are hypotheses that stigmatising the period may have been the beginning of **patriarchy**; this is because anybody menstruating may have voluntarily removed themselves from social groups or not allowed their bodies to be touched during this time and eventually men became frustrated with this autonomy as they had no control over the female bodies at this time.

The ability to say “no” during this time also means that periods became a great source of power for women and anyone who menstruated and therefore a fear for men.

And even today it is perceived as negative from a young age; how many times has a boy (or even a man!) said to you “Geese, are you on your period or something?” after he had done something wrong and you had gotten annoyed at him? This sexist mindset is just a way for them to justify their actions and telling themselves it wasn’t actually that bad, that we just can’t control our emotions and must have our period.

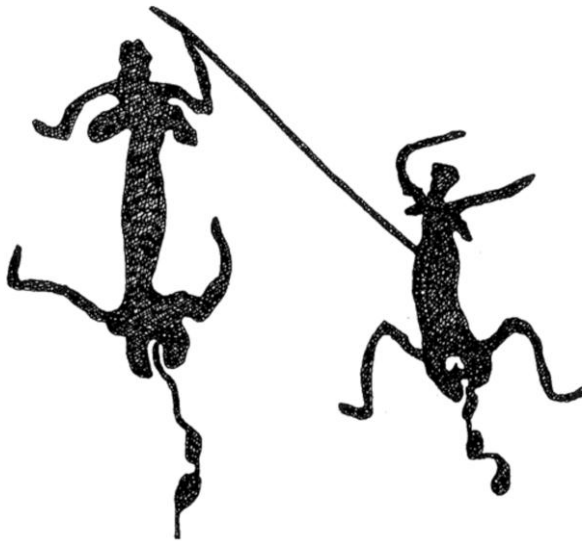
**Misogyny:** dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

**Patriarchy:** a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.



But what about those positive cultural practices? There are cultures in Africa, Indigenous Australia, the Middle East, American and Canadian First Nations and Ancient Greeks who did and often still today view menstruation as powerful and to be respected.

Obviously, all groups have different rites and rituals which belong to their people however it is known that often menstrual blood was and, in many cases, still is considered sacred and used in magic as well as to purify and destroy. In many areas, tents or special areas were available for those menstruating to be just with each other and to perform ceremonies. Almost all cultures understand the connection of the menstrual cycle and the moon and believe that this interrelatedness holds great power.



Two women dancing and menstruating. Rock art by Indigenous Australians from the Upper Yule River, Pilbara, Western Australia.



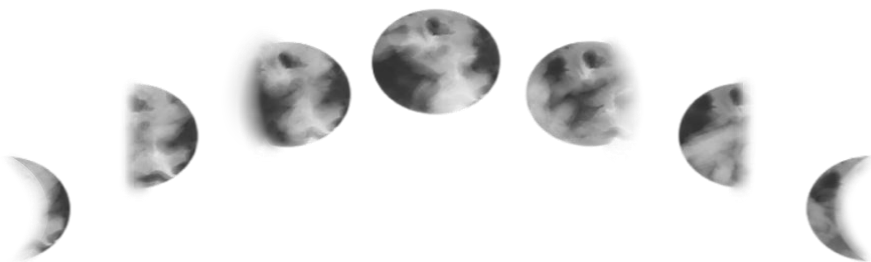
# Menstruation and the Moon

The moon has a cycle of 27.32 days, in which time it makes it way around the Earth. However, from our perspective on Earth, the time it takes to wax into a full moon and then wane again into a new moon is 29.5 days. The average menstrual cycle of approximately 28 days is very close to the length of the lunar cycle and therefore people over thousands of years have connected with, tracked, ritualised and understood their own cycle based on the lunar cycle.

Many people believe that in ancient times, woman and other people who menstruate were in proper sync with the moon and its cycles; ovulating on the full moon and menstruating on the new moon.

Some of us would do the complete opposite and menstruate during the full moon. This is called the red moon cycle and according to Miranda Grey who wrote *Red Moon- Understanding and Using the Creative, Sexual and Spiritual Gifts of the Menstrual Cycle*, a red moon cycle was closely related to people such as healers and shamans.

Many people today still have this synchronicity however due to disconnectedness from nature and its own cycles many of us no longer experience this and menstruate at all different times.

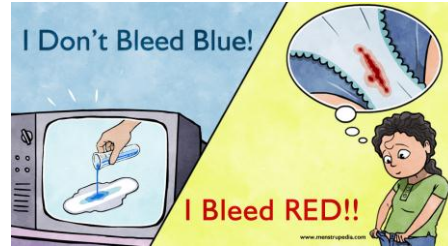




# Period Myths

## Myth 1: Period blood is gross

This is one of the most common and misunderstood myths in the history of the uterus and the consequences of this belief has seriously damaged the way we as a society perceive period blood, ourselves and our partners when menstruation occurs and the way we talk about menstrual health and hygiene. The fact is, your period blood and discharge is completely clean if you have a healthy uterus. Clots, made up of uterine lining and blood can be seen negatively are a very normal part of the cycle while they are not causing pain. Brown coloured blood can be caused by lower than average hormone levels which mean that not all of the uterine lining was shed in the previous cycle but this is nothing to worry about and the blood is still clean.



*“The consequences of squeamishness and taboos around periods because of societal disgust are serious. If your uterus is healthy, your period blood and discharge is completely sterile until it hits oxygen, but concepts of full-body "uncleanliness" for menstruating women have manifested themselves in many cultures, resulting in illogical restrictions worldwide against women on their periods preparing food, entering holy places or being around others at all. The belief that periods are disgusting and refusal to help people who menstruate deal with them in a supportive, healthy way also keeps girls out of education, holding back the empowerment of the entire gender.”*

- Bustle.com

## Myth 2: You can't have sex while you are menstruating

Many women and people who menstruate prefer this time as time for themselves; to relax and look after the body and the mind. This does not mean that that is what must be done however!

To have sex while on your period had become a hugely disapproved of activity with the stigma stemming from the false idea that period blood is dirty and from the belief of some cultures that anyone on their period should be avoided.



This idea however is not valid and it is assured that many people can enjoy sex (or even prefer it!) while they are menstruating.

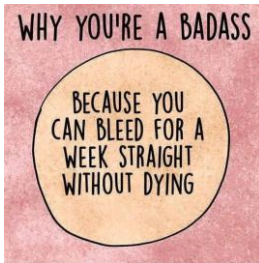
Some people may find that their vaginas are quite sore and sensitive during this time or that they are more susceptible to thrush or other infections during menstruation and find that sex is just not a comfortable option for them which is also completely normal and ok!

### **Remember!**

Not all sex has to be penetrative or inner vaginal sex...

Get creative and see what gets you excited!

### Myth 3: You lose a lot of blood while menstruating



The average amount of blood lost during menstruation is 2-3 tablespoons or if its heavy 4 tablespoons may be lost however this is very easily replenished by the body and not a significant loss unless the person has medical conditions, for example if they are already anaemic a monthly blood

loss can cause complications. I'm no doctor so if you want to know more or think this may be you please contact your local medical practitioner!



# Premenstrual Syndrome

## Myths

### **Myth 1: Everyone who menstruates has PMS**

To understand this, we need to understand the difference between 'premenstrual symptoms' and 'premenstrual syndrome' (PMS). Premenstrual symptoms occur naturally to almost everyone who gets a period, they can include minor emotional changes such as slight irritation or anxiousness or physical changes such as tender breasts and bloating in the one to two weeks leading up to the period. Many people also have a craving for chocolate or other sweet things during this time so it's a great excuse to indulge a bit!

Premenstrual syndrome however is when emotional, physical or behavioural symptoms start to negatively and severely affect your daily life in the lead up to your period. This is experienced by a much smaller amount of the menstruating population.

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder or PMDD is also brought on for a small number of people during this time. Those with PMDD may experience severe anxiety or depression due to hormonal changes during the premenstrual phase. As with PMS these symptoms will generally be alleviated once the bleeding starts.

## Myth 2: The premenstrual phase is always negative

The last one or two weeks of our cycle, before your period starts again is a time when hormone levels are fluctuating and so it is common for people to feel anxious, irritable or more upset than normal however the thing is it that during this stage we can be simply more sensitive to emotional stimuli and therefore often feel like life is all too much. However, the emotions do not necessarily have to be negative. If we slow down and give ourselves the time we need we can find ourselves feeling joy, gratefulness and other positive emotions during this time as well.



**I have PMS...got it?**



The societal social conditioning which many of us in the Western world are exposed to means that we automatically ‘look out for’ and notice quicker any negative moods we feel during this time and we are quick to attribute them to PMS.

Many ancient or traditional cultures believe this time to be the time when the “veil” between one’s physical world and one’s spiritual world is thinnest and that those in the PM phase are then at their closest to their own truth and wisdom. This could be why many of us feel less satisfied or more irritated than normal at this time; because our intuitive selves are stronger and telling us louder what it is

in our lives that does not serve us. It is good to listen to this side of yourself and delve into what it could be that is conjuring these emotions for you. Are they worth having in your life? Can you change these things for yourself? If you can't then what can you learn from these things and how can you deal with them so that they don't affect you as much?

The PM phases as well as the menstrual phase are times when introspection is very effective. Give yourself some alone time, time to contemplate, let go of negative things that you don't need in your life and listen to the wisdom you hold in you.

However, please remember that if you are someone who experiences anxiety and depression on a more chronic basis or experiences PMDD that the thoughts and emotions conjured in this phase may not be rational or of service to you personally and therefore it is important to recognise this. As I am not a doctor

or a psychologist, I cannot recommend anything for this case however there are many people out there who can help you with these things if need be! Remember you are not alone.

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"Hormone replacement therapy will make you feel much better. I'm replacing your hormones with rainbows, sunshine and glitter."

### **Myth 3: Hormone fluctuations are the only cause of negative PM symptoms**

While it is true, as described above, that we can be more emotionally sensitive during this time, researchers believe that our overall mental and physical health play a much larger role in the severity of our PM symptoms. Regular exercise and healthy eating not only means that our brains and bodies are happier and healthier but that inflammation in our bodies is lessened as well, meaning at we are less likely to be in pain and more likely to be in an ok mood!

That's not to say that we can't indulge in a bit more chocolate at this time of the month and let ourselves relax a bit; it's more about how we live generally during the rest of the cycle and remember that treating ourselves sometimes and letting our bodies rest and recuperate is an important part of a holistic healthy life!



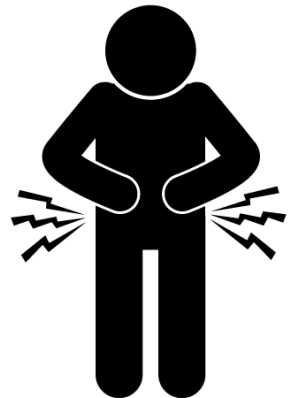
**"I was able to neutralize the stress hormone using chocolate."**

# Healthy tips and tricks to relieve period pain

Cramps, back pain, tenderness, nausea, headaches, migraines, dizziness... all these symptoms can affect you before and during your period and none of them are much fun at all!

Many of these symptoms happen because of inflammation and fluid retention at this time of the month. Some people may experience these things so severely that they need to seek out proper medical assistance however if your symptoms are not too debilitating just a bit sore and annoying then there are some simple things you can do for yourself that may help either prevent or relieve the pain.

Firstly, ensuring inflammation is under control before your period starts can help a lot! General exercise and a healthy diet will do wonders for inflammation. Processed foods, alcohol and refined sugars are inflammatory foods which if not limited appropriately may affect you more during your period.





Anti-inflammatory herbs and spices can make very helpful additions to your meals and drinks. Some of these include

Turmeric  
Cayenne  
Ginger  
Cinnamon  
Mint  
Cloves  
Sage  
Rosemary  
Chamomile



You can use a hot pack to ease pain once you already have your period. Also remember to stay well hydrated and get enough sun light so that your body gets enough vitamin D.

Remember to let yourself relax and look after your body if that is how it is feeling! Do some gentle stretching or even have a nap. Listen to what your body is telling you and let yourself have that bit chocolate if you're craving it!

If none of these things help and you just want the pain gone, some antiinflammatory tablets or painkillers will probably work quickly. Taking these things often is not particularly good for your body but it is what many people must do to get on with their day when they menstruate so try out your options and see what works and doesn't work for you.

# Period Poverty

To have access to menstrual hygiene products and reasonable sexual health education is a privilege. Many people in the global south have little to no access to hygiene products and have very little if any education about sexual health. This is not limited to the global south however; in America, sanitary items are taxed as non-essential goods meaning people in lower income brackets are unable to afford them. Until recently Australia, Canada, the UK and Ireland all taxed tampons and pads, adding around \$10 on GST. However, taking the tax away still does not mean that these products are accessible to everyone. I would argue that they should be much cheaper if not free, especially in places such as schools, universities and health clinic.

In areas where sanitary products are inaccessible or unavailable, people are forced into using dirty rags and often end up with health issues such as urinary tract infections and other bacterial and yeast infections around their vagina.

In some conservative religious areas around the world, young girls, non-binary and trans-people who menstruate are demonised for the “sin” accounted to menarche (the first period) and/or in areas where sexual education simply does not exist, menarche is a traumatising event, as young people simply do not know what is happening to their bodies.

We need to talk about menstruation, normalise it and support those who do not have access to sanitary products!

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Lunar Fertility, 2019, JANE BENNETT AND FRANCESCA  
NAISH

I acknowledge that this zine was made on the stolen lands of  
the Woiwurrung language group of the Kulin Nations. I pay  
my respects to elders past present and emerging.  
Sovereignty was never ceded.

Please copy, print, download and distribute this zine